



## THE ALUMNI PERSPECTIVE

by Mike Snow

Greetings,

I've just returned to the states a few weeks ago from a great two week recharge at Orayta. I knew even before I left Orayta at the end of last year that I would make it my business to return soon and regularly. I, like many of my *chevra*, was quite nervous about coming back to my America life, leaving the Orayta *beit midrash* behind. I was anxious about changing the connection I had with the *rebbeim* and their families to a long distance one. I was nervous that it would mean leaving behind the veritable values the *rebbeim* work so hard to demonstrate in their own lives. I was concerned about leaving my homeland for "secular university" and all that it represented. On a deeper level, I feared that I was trading in one set of values and ideologies for another, so to speak.



Then college started. It turned out that life post yeshiva does exist, and isn't that bad. While I very much miss my time at Orayta, I have come to realize that here in the secular world, outside of yeshiva, I have so many opportunities to implement all that I learnt at Orayta.

True, I was originally less than thrilled to wake up each morning to report to history or anthropology class, and not the classic array of colorful banter and exclamations from Rav Noam. Further, no matter how much open space I have in upstate New York, I still miss the irreplaceable sights, sounds and smell of the Old City, *Machane Yehuda* and Ben Yehuda Street.

Nevertheless, I feel proud that every decision I make is based off of a lesson I learnt at Orayta. Here, in the world out side of yeshiva, life is much less black and white but more grey. Suddenly I, and no one else, am solely responsible for managing my own time. In college there are no friendly *madrachim* to encourage me to make it to *shacharit*. I am without a morning *seder* and *shiur rebbe*, but instead have syllabi and professors. While it is true that these conditions introduce tough decisions in an unfamiliar environment, I feel that they also can make for so much more of a meaningful positive Jewish life. Only in the world of grey and ambiguity do we have the true free choice to find Hashem of our own volition.

I have tried my best to do this by taking all my experiences and the sum total of my year at Orayta and ensure its lasting permanence in my everyday life in college. In essence, I have been trying to take the intangible Truth I learnt at Orayta, and make it real and alive, as reflected through my everyday actions and decisions. I think this idea is reflected in this week's *Parasha of Terumah*.

The **Ramban** talks about how the deeper purpose of the entire Exodus had not been achieved until the heights that the nation had reached temporarily during the giving of the Torah at Sinai were made a permanent part of existence by means of the *Mishkan*. If we delve beneath the surface of all the precise specifications for the construction of the *Mishkan*, it is really about Hashem's deep love for us, and his desire to "dwell among us". More accurately, I believe this verse articulates Hashem's eternal call upon us to create a space for him here, on this earth. That means everywhere, even "secular college campus".

But what does that mean? What could it possibly mean that Hashem has a desire for us to create a space for him to reside here, in this world?

This question and this mission, is the essence of a Jew's purpose. The tasks and details the Torah gives us are all to achieve this holy mission of building a place for Hashem here in this world. We realize this goal through the proper words, thoughts and actions. Of course Hashem does not live in a single place and what we are really trying to do is build a place for him inside of us, in our hearts.

As the psalmist says, "In my heart I will erect a sanctuary."

We can now see how construction of the *Mishkan* was more than just an architectural job, but rather a spiritual and metaphysical endeavor. Further, only through the construction of the *Mishkan*, and all that it represented, could the significance of the mass revelation and giving of the Torah maintain its meaning and sovereignty until today.

So too, I do my best to take the sum total of my year at Orayta and distill it to the everyday, simultaneously guaranteeing and reaffirming the values I learnt at Orayta, and in a broader sense, the ever lasting Truth of *Matan Torah*.

I am really grateful, and always conscious of everything that I learnt at Orayta. I am not only talking about lessons from *shiur*, but also from lasting dialogues with my friends and *rebbeim* on *tiyulim*, on hikes. I am talking about inspirational late Thursday night singing in preparation for Shabbat. I am talking about hours spent on the Orayta roof connecting to my higher Self. I am talking about the respect and love everyone had for each other, and the shared respect and love for Torah, at Orayta.

Shabbat Shalom